

Rising Tensions in the Caribbean

The Soviet military build-up in Cuba soon followed. As with other third world nations like Egypt and Indonesia, Soviet arms shipments to Cuba came in stages, starting with small arms and ending with aircraft and warships. By the end of 1961, the Soviets had provided the Cuban military with rifles, machine guns, tanks, artillery, over thirty early-model MiG jet fighters, and a few helicopters, transport planes, and small naval vessels.

The CIA obtained much of its information on this build-up from the monthly flights of U-2 aircraft over Cuba. Developed in the mid-1950s to gather intelligence on the Soviet Union and the Communist countries of eastern Europe, the U-2 flew at 70,000 feet, where Soviet fighters could not operate effectively. The aircraft also had tremendous range and

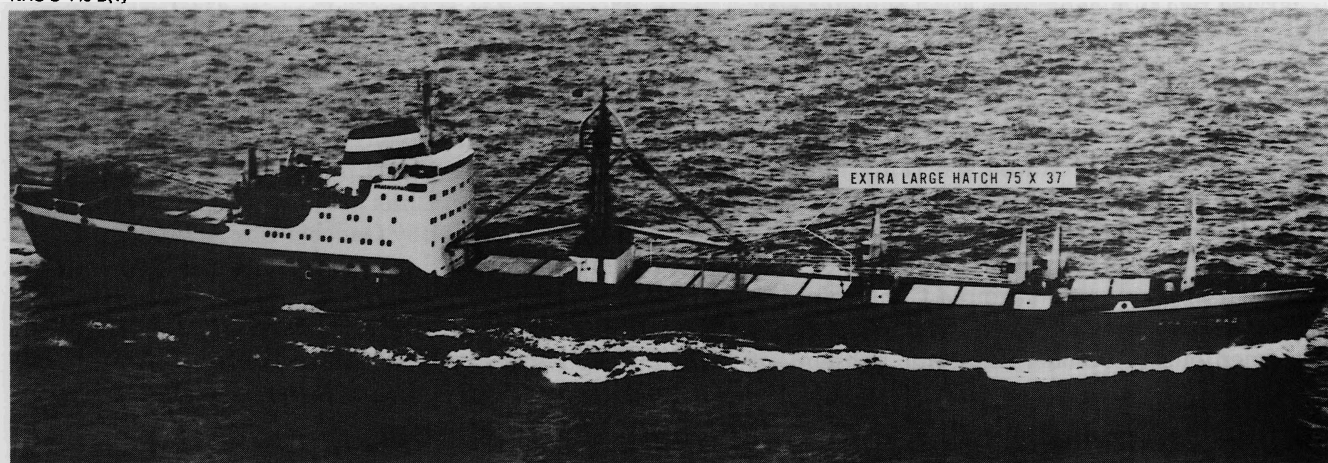
provided a stable platform for specially designed cameras. The Soviet downing of Francis Gary Powers' U-2 over the Ural Mountains in 1960 with SA-2 surface-to-air missiles (SAM) restricted the planes' operational flexibility, but the U-2s continued to fly over Cuba and other areas that lacked missile defenses.

American intelligence learned of Soviet arms shipments not only by U-2 flights over Cuba but through Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps observation of Soviet merchant vessels. Turkey-based Navy detachments and Sixth Fleet air patrol units photographed Soviet and Eastern Bloc vessels in the Bosphorus Strait and in the Mediterranean, while Navy patrol squadrons based at Naval Station (NS), Bermuda, and Naval Air Station (NAS), Jacksonville, Florida, overflew ships in the Atlantic. Coast Guard and Marine

planes photographed Soviet and bloc ships as they neared Cuba. Photographic interpreters often could tell the type and amount of military material being transported by noting if the merchantman was high or low in the water and by analyzing the cargo on deck, whether stowed openly or crated.

American intelligence agents, friendly foreign nationals, and journalists also provided information about Soviet activities in Cuba. Throughout the spring and summer of 1962, these sources reported the arrival in Cuba of large numbers of Soviet "technicians," who traveled under common Russian names to deceive U.S. intelligence. For instance, Marshal Sergi Biryuzov appeared on one passenger list as "the engineer Petrov." These men were sent to remote parts of the island, where they selected and

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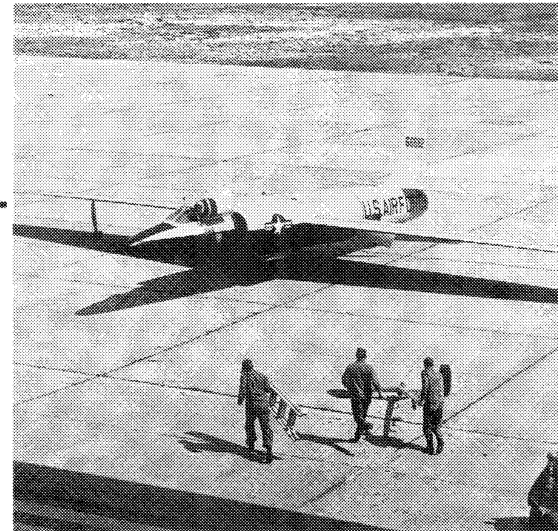


A Navy patrol plane photographed the Soviet freighter *Krasnograd* as she steamed for Cuba in September 1962, probably carrying SS-4 missiles. U.S. and allied aircraft and ships closely monitored the passage of Soviet merchantmen through the Atlantic and Caribbean.

planned missile sites and other military installations meant to accommodate incoming Soviet arms and "technicians." Press service photos revealed that many of the latter were young, fit men with short hair—clearly soldiers out of uniform. Later that

year, U.S. intelligence identified four Soviet regimental combat groups in Cuba.

The increase in Soviet activity, including the possible arrival of missiles in Cuba, worried CIA Director John A. McCone; consequently, he doubled the number of U-2



U-2s, Crusaders, and Voodoos

The intelligence provided by U.S. reconnaissance aircraft was vital to President Kennedy's successful management of the Cuban Missile Crisis. These planes, flown with skill and courage by American pilots, and equipped with state-of-the-art cameras, captured photographs of such quality that they convinced U.S., United Nations, and Organization of American States officials of Soviet duplicity regarding Cuba.

The Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance plane was designed during the 1950s to monitor the status of the Soviet Union's long-range bomber, intercontinental ballistic missile, and nuclear weapons programs. Flying at 70,000 feet, the U-2s could photograph a 100-mile-wide swath of territory equal to the distance from Washington, D.C., to Phoenix, Arizona. The U-2's 36-inch focal length camera, known as the "B" camera, carried two film canisters. Each canister was loaded with 5,000 feet of 9-inch by 9-inch film. The camera took pictures from seven different positions onto each roll of film, producing a stereo image 18 by 18 inches. The resolution of the photographs produced was remarkable—items less than three feet square on the ground could be easily distinguished.

While the Central Intelligence Agency flew the U-2 missions over and around Cuba before mid-October 1962, the Air Force carried out the momentous 14 October flight and subsequent missile crisis flights. U-2 pilot Major Rudolf Anderson, USAF, paid the ultimate price for his bravery and dedication to duty over Cuba. A Communist SA-2 surface-to-air missile downed his aircraft and killed Anderson on 27 October,

at the height of the crisis.

Navy and Marine aviators flying the Vought F8U-1P Crusader carried out many of the vital low-level photographic reconnaissance missions during the crisis. Intelligence specialists considered the Navy's Light Photographic Squadron (VFP) 62 the best low-level reconnaissance unit in the armed forces, because the unit's personnel were well trained and the Crusader was an especially stable aerial photography platform equipped with cameras of advanced design. Several Crusaders of Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 2 were attached to VFP-62 at Key West, Florida. The cameras carried by the Navy and Marine Crusaders were small-format, six-inch focal length cameras—the KA-45 and KA-46. Both cameras carried 250 feet of five-inch-wide film.

The mainstay of the Air Force tactical reconnaissance effort was the McDonnell RF-101C Voodoo. The aircraft was a good platform for medium or high-altitude aerial photographic work, but its cameras proved less than satisfactory for low-level work. Consequently, Admiral George Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations, agreed to a request by General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, for a number of the new KA-45 cameras due the Navy from the manufacturer. Half of the production run was diverted to the Air Force so the RF-101s could be equipped with some of the best cameras then available. Air Force tactical reconnaissance squadrons with the KA-45s soon became quite proficient at low-level photography.

An Air Force Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance plane. This aircraft, while ungainly in appearance, was able to fly long distances at great speed and altitude. This was possible because the U-2 was built of lightweight materials. Indeed, the wings were so delicate that they needed wheeled supports, called "pogos," when the aircraft was on the ground.

missions to two per month. These flights, however, did not confirm the presence of any missiles.

While photographic reconnaissance discovered nothing untoward, Cuban agents and refugees began reporting that Soviet SA-2 anti-aircraft missiles might be in Cuba. Despite the lack of clear proof, McCone concluded that SA-2s would soon be deployed on the island, and on 22 August so informed the president. Kennedy ordered another U-2 mission, which the CIA executed on 29 August. When the information from this flight was evaluated, in the words of one analyst, "the sirens were on and the red lights were flashing."

The photo intelligence confirmed the presence of eight sites on the northern coast of Cuba east and west of Havana that would soon accommodate SAMs. Analysts decided that these sites were the beginnings of an overall, integrated air defense network for Cuba, not just defenses for specific locations. McCone concluded that the principal target for the SAMs would be his U-2s. The 29 August images also revealed a missile site that overlooked several possible amphibious landing areas near the city of Banes in eastern Cuba. A U-2 mission flown on 5 September located additional sites near likely landing areas. Intelligence analysts eventually deduced that these installations contained SS-2-C coastal defense missiles.

Naval intelligence also reported on the sighting of a Soviet-built *Komar*-class guided missile boat off the Cuban port of Mariel. Using the U-2 photography taken 29 August, the Americans confirmed the presence of 13 Soviet-built patrol vessels there, including seven *Komars*. These vessels substantially improved the coastal defense capabilities of the small Cuban Navy, which previously put to sea only a few old World War II frigates and subchasers.

Even these older vessels, however, were not toothless. On 30 August, two Cuban frigates fired on an S2F Tracker antisubmarine warfare plane manned by a U.S. Naval Reserve crew and flying a training mission over international waters, 15 nautical miles from Cuba. The Kennedy administration lodged a diplomatic protest with Cuba, stating that in the future, U.S. armed forces would "employ all means necessary for their own protection." Castro personally denied Cuban involvement in the episode but also used the occasion to remind the world that Cuba's airspace had been violated numerous times by foreign military aircraft; this was an obvious reference to the CIA's U-2s. The 5 September mission, flown over eastern and central Cuba, also revealed the presence of first-line, Soviet-made MiG-21 fighters. These planes had the potential to shoot down a U-2.

In response to this new in-

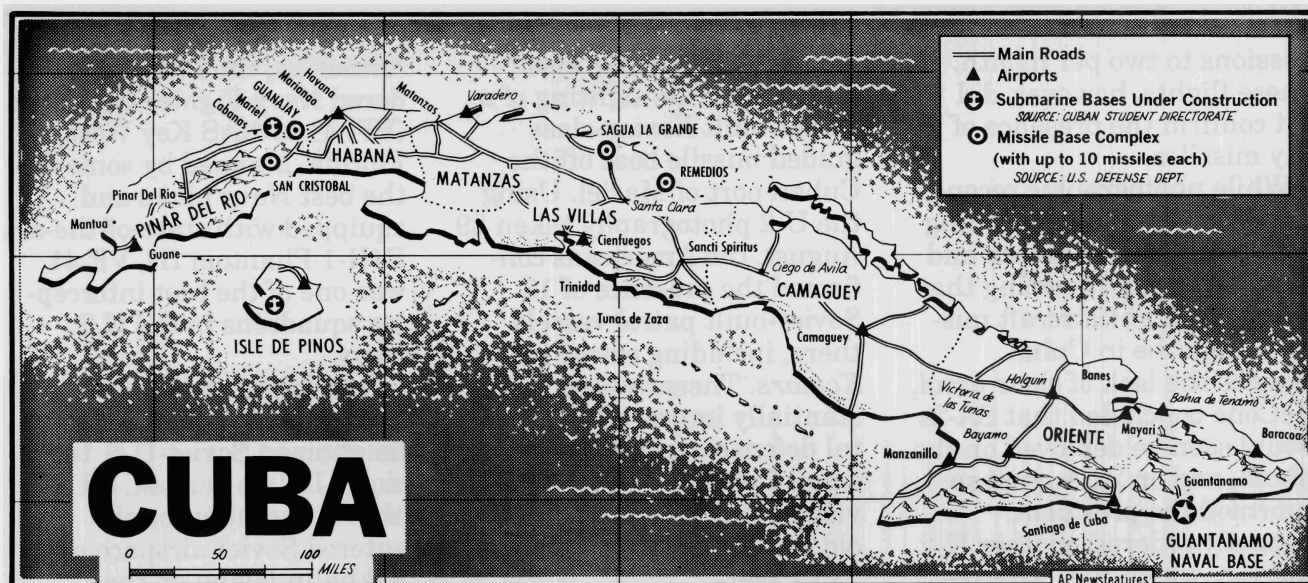
formation, the Pentagon ordered Navy Fighter Squadron (VF) 41 to NAS Key West, Florida. Manned by some of the best Navy pilots and equipped with state-of-the-art F4H-1 Phantom IIs, VF-41 was one of the best interceptor squadrons in the U.S. Navy.

Developments in other trouble spots of the world heightened Soviet-U.S. tensions. In late August, a U-2 aircraft unintentionally entered Soviet airspace over Sakhalin Island on the USSR's Pacific coast. Khrushchev's government protested the "gross violation" of the Soviet frontier and suggested that U-2 bases in Great Britain, West Germany, Turkey, and Japan might be at risk.

U.S. domestic politics also added to the growing international anxiety. In the midst of a midterm Congressional election, Senator Kenneth Keating (R-NY), although having no official access to intelligence, publicly stated his belief that there were Soviet SAMs and troops in Cuba. Keating accused the Kennedy administration of covering up this information. Other members of Congress called for a U.S. blockade of Cuba to compel Soviet withdrawal from the island. Some Democratic leaders demanded even more aggressive action by Kennedy.

Faced with challenges in the domestic and international political arenas, and in possession of the most recent aerial intelligence, Kennedy

A newspaper map of military and naval installations in Cuba, October 1962. U.S. intelligence identified Soviet-made *Komar*-class missile boats at the port of Mariel and Il-28 Beagle bombers at airfields near Holguin and San Julian (called Guane on this map).



LC Geography and Map Division

responded to the Cuban problem. In statements to the press on 4 and 13 September, the president revealed that the United States knew Soviet-supplied SAMs and other defensive weapons had been deployed to Cuba. He implied that the United States could tolerate their presence. He also stated that there was no substantive evidence of offensive weapons in Cuba. The president added sternly, "were it to be otherwise, the gravest issues would arise."

During the first week of September, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin met with several members of the Kennedy administration. Acting on directions from Khrushchev, Dobrynin told Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the president's younger brother, that the Soviet buildup in Cuba was of no significance. He assured Kennedy that no offensive weapons would be placed in Cuba, specifically ground-to-

ground missiles. Kennedy reminded Dobrynin that the United States monitored Soviet activity in Cuba closely, and that the deployment of offensive missiles on the island would cause severe repercussions. In a meeting with Adlai Stevenson, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Dobrynin again affirmed that no offensive weapons would be placed in Cuba.

Dobrynin's communications were part of a program of deception orchestrated from Moscow to reduce U.S. suspicions. Khrushchev kept Dobrynin in the dark about the action long after approving deployment of the offensive missiles to Cuba.

Despite Robert Kennedy's statement regarding the continued close surveillance of Cuba, the presence there of SAMs and fighters increased the danger to the U-2s. At a White House meeting on 10 September, Secretary of State

Dean Rusk and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy argued that the information obtained from the missions was not worth the military and political risks. Even though the CIA Deputy Director, Army Major General Marshall "Pat" Carter and Robert Kennedy disagreed strongly, the president directed that the missions over Cuba be stopped and that henceforth the U-2s fly out of harm's way over the sea and parallel to the Cuban coastline. These flights along the periphery brought back little useful information and revealed nothing about operations in the interior of the island.

Navy reconnaissance of Soviet merchantmen, however, continued to pay dividends. An aerial photograph of the Soviet freighter *Kasimov* showed ten long, thin boxes on deck. Photo interpreters, practicing the mysterious art of "crateol-